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ABSTRACT

Colleges and universities have failed to meet the unique educational needs of Native American students, whose attrition rates are far in excess of those of other students. These students must come to terms with their cultural identity while functioning within the culturally alien framework presented by the school. Federally funded programs have had a residual effect of partially meeting these needs, but now federal funding is dwindling. Working within existing academic budgets, institutions must adjust their approaches to curriculum planning to address these concerns: (1) application of unique Indian linguistic and cognitive styles to academic tasks; (2) clarification of students' cultural identities and improvement of their self-esteem; and (3) assistance in dealing with cultural conflict. Suggested classes and process experiences include: (1) a course exploring Native American and Euro-American values and culture, individual cultural values, and the self in relation to the college system; (2) an ongoing seminar to provide continuous guidance and support throughout the college years; (3) a career awareness course; (4) a class to improve students' usage of standard English; and (5) a professional writing course. The paper includes 11 references. (SV)

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NATIVE AMERICANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

State supported colleges and universities have increased their enrollments of Native American students, making the special needs of these students more visible. Colleges and universities, with their professional experts, are in unique positions to deliver very positive impact on the growth of states and a nation by graduating well educated Native Americans. That potential impact could be considerably enhanced by higher education faculties who expand sensitivity and commitment to the Native American populations and adjust their approaches to curriculum planning. For the most part, colleges and universities recognize Native American educational needs but have not addressed them in curriculum planning. We need to graduate more capable, well-educated Native Americans who will rise to the personal commitment to improving the quality of life for Native American people across the states and the nation. They must broaden their understanding of unique student needs to include the needs of this minority group.

Attrition rates of Native American students at colleges and universities have been far in excess of other students, indicating a failure to meet unique educational needs of Native American students. Federally funded projects have focused more attention on the needs of Native American students than ever before. These projects, designed to train Native American students for a variety of professional positions, obviously made direct impact on college curricula, through the addition of courses designed to meet project objectives. But they also had important indirect influence on both graduate and undergraduate programs in some unplanned ways.

These new Native American related courses were available to Native and non-Native students alike. The courses and the instructors of Native American descent they brought to campuses brought more visibility to Native American concerns and provided both formal and informal learning opportunities to all who were interested in studying issues and concerns of the Native American people. Perhaps more subtle, but equally important, was the effect on the curriculum when Native American students brought their own interests and concerns to class discussions and small group projects. The effect was a broadening of the involvement of staff and students in the educational concerns of Indian

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people. Also, in a natural, informal way, Native American students became resource people, exposing instructors and students to a multicultural influence. This influence increased sensitivity of many instructors and students to Native American concerns in both graduate and undergraduate classes.

Native American projects influenced education in other ways, too. Federally funded project offices frequently became informal gathering places for Native American students, who soon learned that they could come to such centers to find a support group of peers. These centers provided the opportunity for Native American students to find positive role models. In addition, they could be assured of finding well qualified Native American faculty and other students, including graduate students, who would take time to listen and advise them.

Unique needs and concerns of undergraduate Native American students were to some extent being met as a residual effect of the federally funded programs. Unfortunately, federal funding for Indian programs has steadily decreased over the past years. Most colleges and universities have been unable to continue Indian programs without federal monies. The loss of these has obviously had a direct negative impact on college and universities' ability to attract and retain students. But, also, it has an indirect impact on those students currently enrolled by diminishing one very important source of support and guidance for Native American students.

Now that even the incidental help of the federally funded programs is being withdrawn, the time has come when colleges and universities must address the atypical developmental concerns of Native American students directly. University retention and graduation rates for Native American students apparently have not shown any improvement in the past fifteen years. The Kennedy Report (U.S. Senate Special Subcommittee on Indian Education) of 1969 showed that only 17 of every 100 Indian students entering high school would go on to college and that only about six of those would complete college work. In a recent editorial commentary, Red Horse (1986) reports that those percentages have not changed. Apparently, colleges and universities are not meeting the educational needs of their Indian populations. Institutions must identify the special concerns of this cultural group and integrate comprehensive plans to address those in the curricula.

A review of the literature reveals considerable agreement about what Native American students need from college programs. For the purposes of discussion, we have grouped these needs into three categories: (1) applying unique Indian linguistic and cognitive styles to learning and other related academic tasks; (2) assistance with clarifying their cultural identities; and (3) assistance in learning how to deal with cultural conflict.

College entrance scores suggest that many Native American students would benefit from opportunities to expand fluency with language - both with speed of reading comprehension and expression with written language. The difficulties many Native American students have in these areas have resulted from incongruence between learning and linguistic

styles of Native Americans and the Euro-American designed school system. Ornstein (1973), among others, suggests that cultural background may influence the development of differences in learning style. At this time, there appears enough evidence to suggest that a significant number of Native Americans may be operating from a holistic, relational cognitive style rather than the linear, sequential style that is characteristic of the Euro-American style (Browne, 1983; Cattey, 1980; Ross, 1983). Bill Leap (1985), from his study of Native American languages, has suggested that linguistic differences may be operating. Certainly, linguistic and learning style differences that are culture based need to be considered in designing learning opportunities where students can develop effectiveness with standard English. Native American students need opportunities to become aware of these differences and to interpret them in terms of characteristic learning strengths rather than to perceive "different" as being "less than."

A second important consideration for Native American students is assistance in developing awareness of their own cultural identity. Heaps and Morrill (1979) found that "...one of the major educational and counseling tasks in working with Navajo students, other Native American students, or students from any minority or disadvantaged groups, is that of improving their self concept or their cultural identities...." (pp. 13-14). Cultural identity is so important to Indian students that it has, in fact, been identified as the primary predictor of college success (Huffman, Sill & Brokenleg, 1986). In order to clarify cultural identity, students need to verbalize and process values. As they become more conscious of their own culture, they become personally integrated with it. With this internalization, they develop a framework from which to evaluate experiences and make conscious choices which set directions for their lives.

The task of coming to terms with cultural orientation is complicated by the fact that Native American youth are exposed to many variations in interpretation of the original Native American cultural values. The problem is further compounded by elements of the Euro-American culture which have been incorporated by some Native American people. Contemporary Native American culture reflects values distortion resulting from the efforts of the majority culture to disrupt and change their culture (Kennedy, 1969). Survival for Native American people has been dependent on adoption of values (competition, for example) that are inconsistent with their traditional cultural values.

In the process of coming to terms with their own culture, Native American students need assistance with the additional task of exploring their present culture and sorting out the conflicts caused by Anglo attempts to force change. This additional task is necessary to reaffirm their cultural values as a solid base from which to make balanced and harmonious choices about personal cultural identification. They must choose whether to align themselves with original Native American values, to blend values from both cultures, to internalize only Anglo values, or to create a new informed variation. It is not surprising, under these circumstances, that many young Native American people are experiencing confusion with cultural orientation. They need assistance in working

through this confusion so that they can internalize a cohesive and functional value system.

The task of helping young people clarify cultural identity is best approached with a multi-track concept, allowing the student to pursue one or a combination of three paths: (1) to become a totally integrated part of the mainstream Anglo America; (2) be in a position to function bilaterally (biculturally); or (3) function in harmony with the traditional Native American culture. Education for the Native American student should become a freeing process that affords these options. Native American students should have the choice to develop individual cultural bases from which emerges the capacity to join mainstream America if they so desire.

Thirdly, Native American students need assistance to transcend cultural conflict in order to contribute to society, whether Native American Indian, white, or both. They must build on the culture they bring to college, acquiring the knowledge and skills they need to function effectively in a multicultural environment. When colleges ignore original cultures, and students are forced to adapt in order to acquire college degrees, they may end up degreed Native Americans who have not developed the cultural base to apply that degree towards realizing personal and cultural goals.

Colleges and universities should not ignore the Native American students' culture and demand that they fit into the majority culture. To do so not only communicates lack of respect for the Native American culture, but also fails to educate because, initially, education for Native American students means beginning with the experiential and language background of that student. And, secondly, it means providing him or her with the environment and experiences necessary to explore new ways of looking at the world and interpreting experiences.

The cultural values of many Native American students are different from and are often in direct conflict with those of the Anglo values at the base of the educational system. The Anglo student has been assimilating these values through modeling and enforcement since birth, and understands the behaviors expected by the educational system. Unlike their Native American counterparts, Anglo students experience little conflict between the values of the family and the social system and those of the educational system. Most Native American students, consciously or unconsciously, experience constant conflict between their value system and that of the educational system. Although they have come through the elementary and secondary school years in Anglo-designed school systems, they have not internalized the basic psycho-social system of the Anglo-American culture. For example, school administrators constantly struggle to combat Native American absenteeism, because these students do not internalize the Anglo-psycho-social value placed on regular and dependable school attendance. Rather, they may continue to give precedence to their own cultural psycho-cultural priority of meeting personal and relationship needs. It is true that some Anglo students also come to school with priorities different from those of the school. Such discrepancies create conflicts when the student's behavior does not meet school's expectations. The student's inappropriate

behavior may simply be an indication of failure to cope with the complete system in a functional manner. But in time, most of these students come to accept the values and rules of the school, resolving the conflict, because the basic psycho-social and cultural orientation of the student's home and school are basically congruent.

A developmental task for many Native American students is to come to terms with the value system of the parent culture. For the Anglo student, the structure of the university system provides a framework within which that task can be accomplished. Obtaining a university degree is in part a measure of a student's ability to establish a working harmony between individual goals and values and those of the culture as a whole. For Native American students, however, this developmental task is tremendously complicated. If they are to achieve a university degree, they have to learn to function harmoniously within a structure designed from a psycho-social and cultural base different from their own. Also, because the university's cultural base is different, it does not provide a framework within which they can come to terms with the adult values of their own culture.

While the concerns reported are somewhat similar, apparently there is no one effective model for dealing with them. Success of any particular approach tends to depend heavily upon the ability of the individual staff members who are sensitive to Native American students. Most models for Native American students' success tend to be based on the goal of assisting the student to get through college. With these issues in mind, it is suggested that a systematic, but personal, approach is used which addresses both psycho-social and cultural concerns of the Native American students. This proposed model is based on a review of the literature, and personal experiences of the authors who have worked with students over a period of years.

Any plan to intervene in the developmental process, such as the clarification of cultural orientation, must be based on a model which plans for holistic learning. The plan proposed here should start in motion a learning, self-exploration process that will enable Native American students to deal with cultural differences, and at the same time successfully complete university courses of study. The plan offers Native American students guidance in the process of exploring:

1. Traditional to contemporary Native American culture to clarify their personal value base and to take active roles in reorienting self and perhaps their culture, helping to repair the damage done by the domination of the Anglo culture.

2. Contemporary Anglo cultural values so that they can understand and coexist effectively with that Anglo culture.

3. Anglo values as an alternative to native American values.

After students have established their personal values and cultural bases, they can select life and career goals which should lead to constructive interaction with a multicultural world without a loss of personal and cultural identity.

The courses and experiences described below should help colleges and universities to provide appropriate education to Native American students. Rather than depend totally on federally funded projects as they have in the past, institutions of higher education need to address individual Native American students' needs within the existing academic budget.

Following is a description of a sequence of classes and process experiences to implement the plan for Native American students:

SELF AWARENESS

A course designed to develop conscious awareness of individual values and culture. Values and culture of Native Americans and Euro-Americans are studied. Students explore individual cultural values within the context of the broader Euro-American and Native American cultures. In addition, student explore self in relation to the college system to 1) set personal meaning, purpose, and direction, 2) formalize a plan and strategy for obtaining a formal education, and 3) establish goals and plans for the application of their education to the total spectrum of Native and Euro-American culture.

SELF-EXPLORATION SEMINAR

A seminar consisting of small groups designed to facilitate students' discussion and integration of information. The groups serve as ongoing support groups in the first semester and continue in the same group throughout the college experience. These groups serve, also, as informal laboratories for processing of the content provided in self awareness and career exploration courses. In addition, the groups serve as a source of ongoing direction and guidance in college procedures and general support for academic achievement.

CAREER AWARENESS CLASS

A class taken during the sophomore year to assist students in the exploration of both Native American and Euro-American worlds of work and in bridging the two. The course draws on the expertise of professional and business personnel from both Native and Euro-American communities and schools. Students are encouraged to explore the nature of specific occupations including personal factors such as temperament and attitudes as well as the knowledge and skill they require.

PERSONAL READING AND WRITING IMPROVEMENT

A course designed as an individualized, laboratory experience where students increase their control over the use of standard English in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Programs are based on continuous assessment and attention is focused on helping students develop awareness of themselves as language users. Students work toward

increased effectiveness with a variety of kinds of texts utilized in a college setting. They are provided with a learning environment which will encourage the kind of risk taking necessary for development of increased control over the use of language.

PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Many colleges have a course in professional writing that may be appropriate. Such courses typically include a study of communication theory as it relates to the preparation of reports, letters, memoranda and other written communications. Such courses are often designed for upper division students in preprofessional programs.

This sequence of activities will assist Native American students to move beyond cultural conflict to clarify individual cultural identity. They should also encourage instructors to focus on the linguistic and learning styles of the Native American. What appears as "weaknesses" in facility with written language may in actuality be linguistic and learning styles differences. Understanding these differences should be a first step in planning to meet learning needs of Native American students. And it can be a first step for the students toward seeing how their own learning strengths can be applied to academic success.

We have considered, also, Native American students' need to understand the conflict between Native American cultural values and those of the Euro-American designed educational system. This understanding is a necessary basis for learning to adapt to the requirements of the college or university system and function in a multicultural society. We have suggested courses that address specific needs. We have also included an ongoing seminar experience which will provide continuous guidance and support during the college years.

If colleges and universities understand and plan for the cultural differences Native American students bring to their campuses, these differences can be a source of expanded cultural awareness for all students. Where cultural differences are understood and respected, Native American students can achieve and profit from the services the educational community has to offer.

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